
Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the World's Religions

On the Fiftieth Anniversary of the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1998

Montréal, Québec, Canada

The document you are about to read is an attempt to formulate a Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the World's Religions, as a successor to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 10 December 1948. The occasion for drafting it arose while plans were being finalized for celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the UN's Declaration, through a world conference which met in Montréal from 7-9 December 1998. The Coalition sponsoring the Conference accepted the proposal of the Faculty of Religious Studies at McGill University for including a draft of a proposed Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the World's Religions in the agenda. It was thereupon prepared by Arvind Sharma on behalf of the Faculty and released at the Conference in English and French. The goal of this exercise is to determine whether we, in the academic community, can evolve a consensus around a text for a Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the World's Religions, to which the various religious communities of the world could then be invited to respond. Readers are invited to offer comments by either writing to ARC or to Arvind Sharma (3520 University Street, Montréal, QC, H3A 2A7, Canada; fax 514-398-2102; e-mail: cxlj@musica.mcgill.ca).

Whereas the secular and the sacred are the two main avenues whereby human beings are led to affirm that there is more to life than life itself;

Whereas the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 10 December 1948 draws mainly upon only one of them as a resource;

Whereas at the time of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights religion had retreated from the public square but has since reappeared there in a major way;

Whereas religions are meant to serve humanity and not humanity to serve religion;

Whereas one must not idealize the actual but strive to realize the ideal;

Whereas the various communities constituting the peoples of the world must exchange not only ideas but also ideals;

Whereas not to compensate victims of imperialism, racism, casteism and sexism is itself imperialist, racist, casteist and sexist;

Whereas any further exclusion of the world's religions as positive resources for human rights is obnoxious to the evidence of daily life;

Whereas rights are independent of duties in their protection but integrally related to them in conception and execution;

Whereas in the case of human beings in general, rights and duties are correlative; sub-human creatures may have rights without corresponding duties and in exceptional cases, persons, like mothers in relation to infants, duties without corresponding rights;

Whereas human rights are intended to secure all three—freedom, equality and justice—and to mitigate departures therefrom when they come in conflict;

Now, therefore, on the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the Faculty of Religious Studies, at McGill University, Montréal, Québec, Canada;

The signatories to this Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the World's Religions, as legatees of the religious heritage of humanity do hereby propose the following as the common standard of achievement for the followers of all religions or none, on the 10th day of December, 1998, as Heaven and Earth are our Father and Mother and all people brothers and sisters.

ARTICLE 1

All human beings have the right to be treated as human beings and have the duty to treat everyone as a human being.

ARTICLE 2

Everyone has the right to freedom from violence, in any of its forms, individual or collective; whether based on race, religion, gender, caste or class, or arising from any other cause.

ARTICLE 3

- (1) Everyone has the right to life, longevity and liveability and the right to food, clothing and shelter required to sustain them.
- (2) Everyone has the duty to support and sustain life, longevity and liveability of all.

ARTICLE 4

- (1) No one shall be subjected to slavery or servitude, forced labour, bonded labour or child labour. Slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all its forms.
- (2) No one shall subject anyone to slavery or servitude in any of its forms.

ARTICLE 5

- (1) No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, inflicted either physically or mentally, whether on secular or religious grounds, inside the home or outside it.
- (2) No one shall subject anyone to such treatment.

ARTICLE 6

- (1) Everyone has a right to recognition everywhere as a person before law; and by everyone everywhere as a human being deserving humane treatment, even when law and order has broken down.
- (2) Everyone has the duty to treat everyone else as a human being both in the eyes of law and one's own.

ARTICLE 7

All are equal before law and entitled to equal protection before law without any discrimination on grounds of race, religion, caste, class, sex and sexual orientation. It is the right of everyone to be so treated and the duty of everyone to so treat others.

ARTICLE 8

(1) Everyone has the right to demand restitution for historical, social, economic, cultural and other wrongs in the present and compensation for such wrongs committed in the past, provided that the victims shall always have the right to forgive the victimizers.

(2) Everyone has the duty to prevent the perpetuation of historical, social, economic, cultural and other wrongs.

ARTICLE 9

(1) No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile by the state or by anyone else. The attempt to proselytize against the will of the person shall amount to arbitrary detention, so also the detention, against their will, of teenage children by the parents, and among spouses.

(2) It is the duty of everyone to secure everyone's liberty.

ARTICLE 10

Everyone has the right to public trial in the face of criminal charges and it is the duty of the state to ensure it. Everyone who cannot afford a lawyer must be provided one by the state.

ARTICLE 11

Everyone charged with a penal offence has the right to be considered innocent until proven guilty.

ARTICLE 12

(1) Everyone has the right to privacy. This right includes the right not to be subjected to arbitrary interference with one's privacy; of one's own, or of one's family, home or correspondence.

(2) Everyone has the right to one's good name.

(3) It is the duty of everyone to protect the privacy and reputation of everyone else.

(4) Everyone has the right not to have one's religion misrepresented in the media or the academia.

(5) It is the duty of the follower of every religion to ensure that no religion is misrepresented in the media or the academia.

ARTICLE 13

(1) Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence anywhere in the world.

(2) Everyone has the duty to abide by the laws and regulations applicable in that part of the world.

ARTICLE 14

Everyone has the right to seek and secure asylum in any country from any form of persecution, religious or otherwise, and the right not to be deported. It is the duty of every country to provide such asylum.

ARTICLE 15

- (1) Everyone has the right to a nationality.
- (2) No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of one's nationality nor denied the right to change one's nationality.
- (3) Everyone has the duty to promote the emergence of a federal but single global government—The Parliament of Humanity.

ARTICLE 16

- (1) Everyone has the right to marriage.
- (2) Members of a family have the right to retain and practice their own religion or ideology within a marriage.
- (3) Everyone has the right to raise a family.
- (4) Everyone has the right to renounce the world and join a monastery, provided that one shall do so after making adequate arrangement for one's dependents.
- (5) Marriage and monasticism are two of the most successful institutional innovations of humanity and are entitled to protection by the society and the state.
- (6) Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. It is the duty of everyone to extend special consideration to mothers and children.
- (7) Everyone shall promote the outlook that the entire world constitutes a single family.

ARTICLE 17

- (1) Everyone has the right to own property, alone as well as in association with others. An association also has a similar right to own property.
- (2) Everyone has a right not to be deprived of property arbitrarily. It is the duty of everyone not to deprive others of their property arbitrarily. Property shall be understood to mean material as well as intellectual, aesthetic and spiritual property.
- (3) Everyone has the duty not to deprive anyone of their property or appropriate it in an unauthorized manner.

ARTICLE 18

- (1) There shall be no compulsion in religion. It is a matter of choice.
- (2) Everyone has the right to retain one's religion and to change one's religion.

(3) Everyone has the duty to promote peace and tolerance among religions and ideologies.

ARTICLE 19

(1) Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression, where the term expression includes the language one speaks, the food one eats, the clothes one wears, the religion one practices and professes, provided that one conforms generally to the accustomed rules of decorum recognized in the neighbourhood.

(2) It is the duty of everyone to ensure that everyone enjoys such freedom.

ARTICLE 20

(1) Everyone has the right to freedom of assembly and association, and the duty to do so peacefully.

(2) No one may be compelled to belong to an association or to leave one without due process.

ARTICLE 21

(1) Everyone over the age of eighteen has the right to vote, to elect or be elected and thus to take part in the government or governance of the country, directly or indirectly.

(2) Everyone has the right of equal access to public service in one's country and the duty to provide such access.

(3) It is the duty of everyone to participate in the political process.

ARTICLE 22

Everyone, as a member of society, has a right to social security and a duty to contribute to it.

ARTICLE 23

(1) Everyone has the right to equal pay for equal work and a duty to offer equal pay for equal work.

(2) Everyone has the right for just remuneration for one's work and the duty to justly recompense for work done.

(3) Everyone has the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of one's interests.

ARTICLE 24

(1) Everyone has the right to work and to rest, including the right to support while seeking work and the right to periodic holidays with pay.

(2) The right to rest extends to the earth.

ARTICLE 25

- (1) Everyone has the right to health and to universal medical insurance. It is the duty of the state or society to provide it.
- (2) Every child has the right to an unencumbered childhood and it is the duty of the parents to provide it.

ARTICLE 26

Everyone has the right to free education and the right to equality of opportunity for any form of education involving restricted enrollment.

ARTICLE 27

- (1) Everyone has the right to freely participate in the cultural life of the community and the right to freely contribute to it.
- (2) Everyone has the right to share scientific advances and its benefits and the duty to disseminate them, and wherever possible to contribute to such advances.
- (3) Everyone has the right to the protection of their cultural heritage. It is the duty of everyone to protect and enrich everyone's heritage, including one's own.

ARTICLE 28

Everyone has the right to socio-economic and political order at a global, national, regional and local level which enables the realization of social, political, economic, racial and gender justice and the duty to give precedence to universal, national, regional and local interests in that order.

ARTICLE 29

- (1) One is duty-bound, when asserting one's rights, to take the rights of other human beings; of past, present and future generations; the rights of humanity; and the rights of nature and the earth into account.
- (2) One is duty-bound, when asserting one's rights, to prefer non-violence over violence.

ARTICLE 30

- (1) Everyone has the right to require the formation of a supervisory committee within one's community, defined religiously or otherwise, to monitor the implementation of the articles of this Declaration; and to serve on it and present one's case before such a committee.
- (2) It is everyone's duty to ensure that such a committee satisfactorily supervises the implementation of these articles.